

Fact Sheet: *Legionella* bacteria found in Minneapolis VA Medical Center water system with no cases of human *Legionella* infection

- On November 6, 2015, routine quarterly water testing for *Legionella* was conducted at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center. We were informed of these test results on November 19, 2015. Testing identified low levels of *Legionella* in 12 of 40 water samples. Five of these 12 had *Legionella pneumophila* serotype 1, which is the strain that causes most human illness. Seven were other serotypes or other *Legionella* species that either rarely cause human illness or are not known to cause human illness
- An intensive search from the date of our last negative water testing, September 8, 2015, to the present identified NO healthcare-associated cases of *Legionella*. Also, there have been no healthcare-associated cases of *Legionella* at our facility since we moved into this building in 1988.
- The Minneapolis VA remains committed to being extremely transparent about these testing results.
- We remain committed to delivering high quality care our Veterans, and it is our priority to maintain a safe environment for all who pass through our doors.

The Minneapolis VA *Legionella* testing program

- The Minneapolis VA Health Care System tests follow the proactive approach for *Legionella* testing on a quarterly basis as required by VA. This approach is above and beyond the community standards among other healthcare facilities.
- The key to preventing *Legionella* infections is to eliminate these bacteria while at low levels as detected at the Minneapolis VA.
- Routine quarterly *Legionella* water testing began in 2008. This is the first time that water samples have been positive.
- Routine testing on November 6, 2015 was performed by a new testing company and differences in laboratory process are being evaluated as to why new positive results were identified now.

Action steps taken by Minneapolis VA

- Point-of-use filters were installed on the shower heads and sinks where *Legionella* bacteria were detected.
- The water system is being flushed on an ongoing basis to minimize the risk that *Legionella* bacteria will grow.
- Repeat testing by both the previous company and the current company are being conducted this week to verify the results.
- Clinicians have been notified to have an increased awareness for patients with symptoms of possible infection caused by *Legionella* and order laboratory testing on all of these patients.
- Measures to further eradicate the organism are currently being undertaken.

General facts about *Legionella*

- *Legionella* is a common environmental bacteria. It can be found in natural, freshwater environments, but it is generally present in insufficient numbers to cause disease. Warm water and low water flow are the two main conditions that increase the chance of *Legionella* growing in water systems. Common places for *Legionella* to grow are whirlpool spas, decorative fountains and large buildings with cooling towers.
- When water containing *Legionella* bacteria is aerosolized, or sprayed in small droplets, there is a chance that people can breathe the bacteria into their lungs.
- In general, about half of the strains of *Legionella* bacteria can cause illness in people, but one type, *Legionella pneumophila* serogroup 1, causes most human illness.
- *Legionella* bacteria are NOT spread from one person to another person.
- Most people who are exposed to water that has *Legionella* bacteria do not become sick.

- If people become sick with *Legionella*, it generally is a self-limited illness including fevers, chills, and malaise that lasts for a few days and resolves on its own. This is called Pontiac Fever.
- Sometimes people can develop pneumonia with fever and cough called Legionaries' disease after being exposed to *Legionella*.
- People over the age of 50 or persons with kidney or liver failure, diabetes, chronic lung disease, cancer, active or previous smokers or other types of immune disorders have an increased chance of developing Legionaries' Disease or Pontiac Fever.
- Studies have shown that water with high amounts of *Legionella* is more likely to lead to infections among exposed people.
- More about *Legionella* can be found on the CDC website, the source of the general information above: <http://www.cdc.gov/legionella/fastfacts.html>

Messages especially for Veterans, their families, and volunteers at the Minneapolis VA:

- The chance of a patient, employee, volunteer or family member contracting *Legionella* infection from our facility at this time is minimal.
- Most people who are exposed to *Legionella* do not become sick.
- There have been no healthcare-associated cases of *Legionella* infection at the Minneapolis VA.
- *Legionella* infection has only been found on routine testing in the water.
- If you develop symptoms of cough and fever and feel sick enough that you need to seek care for your illness, you should discuss the possibility of testing for *Legionella* with your health care provider.
- If you have additional questions, you can contact your clinic staff.

Messages especially for employees at the Minneapolis VA:

- The chance of a patient, employee, volunteer or family member contracting *Legionella* infection from our facility at this time is minimal.
- Most people who are exposed to *Legionella* do not become sick
- There have been no healthcare-associated cases of *Legionella* infection at the Minneapolis VA.
- If you develop a cough and fever and feel sick enough that you need to seek care for your illness, you should discuss the possibility of testing for *Legionella* with your health care provider in addition to consideration for other forms of more common respiratory infection such as influenza.
- Because of the action steps already taken at our facility, there are no additional recommended actions you need to take at work at this time
- More information will be provided as it becomes available and more is learned about this situation.

Messages especially for clinicians at the Minneapolis VA:

- We are encouraging clinicians at the Minneapolis VA to consider obtaining testing for *Legionella* in addition to other diagnostic testing if they encounter in-patients who have symptoms consistent with Legionellosis, particularly pneumonia.
- Importantly remember that there are many other more common causes of respiratory infection this time of year, particularly influenza.
- Urine antigen testing for *Legionella pneumophila* type 1 is a very reliable method of diagnosing patients with Legionellosis.
- If urine antigen testing for *Legionella pneumophila* type 1 is negative AND there is still a high clinical suspicion of Legionellosis, a respiratory specimen can be sent for *Legionella* culture.